

XXIII

6th September, 1936.

Somnath Shankar Deshpande, Son of Shankar, Nana Saheb Nimonkar, Brahmin, Inspector of Police, aged 51, 37, Saniwar Peth, Poona says:

I am the son of Nana Saheb Nimonkar. Our place Nimon is 20 miles off Shirdi. There (at Nimon) we have our Vatan of Deshpande. Shirdi is on our way from or to Kopergaon. And at Shirdi, we have relations. Balwantrao (Father of Madhava Rao Deshpande i.e. Shyama) was my father's uncle and loved my father. Once he took my father to Sai Baba saying "People believe he is a mad fakir. I doubt if he is really mad but you had better go with me, see him and give me your opinion." Whenever Balvant had gone to see Baba, the latter kept him at a distance by taking up a brickbat and either flinging it or threatening to fling it at him. Thus he kept away people from going into the Mosque where he stayed. But when my father went to see him, he flung no stones and they approached quite close to him. My father's heart was attracted to Sai as soon as he saw him and on his return home he assured his uncle that Baba was a Saint and not a mad man. The uncle wondered why stones were hurled when he went to Baba formerly but not on the present occasion. "That is because you doubted if he was mad, but I did not " said my father. Since then, my father paid annual and later biennial or more frequent visits to baba - as his faith was steadily increasing.

My father was an Honorary Magistrate of Sangamner and there he met Nana Saheb Chandorkar (the Collector's Chitnis) who also was an admirer of Baba and both would talk together about Baba. When Nana Saheb Chandorkar started the idea of rebuilding Baba's Masjid and collected subscriptions, my father contributed his mite and what is

more he supervised the building operations. Baba would not let the workmen to go on with the work as he complained of their work and undid their work. The building was long being prevented from completing even its foundation. Baba however had great trust in my father and my father hurried on the work all night when Baba slept at that chavadi. Baba showed his faith in my father by making him his banker during the years (1916-18) that he stayed with Baba. As funds came, Baba would hand them over to my father. Even Madhav Rao mistook them for gifts. My father stood in no need of gifts. We had about 500 rupees per annum from our Vatan and I was sending him all moneys he required. Besides, my father also knew the truth of Baba's often repeated statement. "Fakir's money is forced away". If one grasped at and swallowed a Fakir's money, he will in due course have to disgorge it all, to the last pie. My father desired and got from Baba gifts superior to monetary gifts i.e. our temporal and spiritual welfare. So my father paid up all the deposits for Baba's expenses. Baba himself frequently called upon him for these expenses e.g. (a) Burfi would have to be purchase and distributed as present (b) firewood on a large scale also had to be bought etc. We called my father "Kaka", so did the villagers; and so also Baba called him "Kaka".

To illustrate the spiritual benefit received by my father, I will give an instance. My father wished to read "Bhagawat" etc., in Sanskrit as "Pothi"- but his ignorance of the language stood in his way. Baba once said to him:

S.B: Why don't you read Pothi?

N.N: I do not know Sanskrit.

S.B: Never mind. Masjid Ayi will teach you Sanskrit, and gradually you will learn. Begin.

Then with faith in Baba's words, my father began the daily reading of Shrimad Bhagwat and its commentary- both of them in Sanskrit- without understanding what he read. Gradually he began to understand all that he read, and he advanced so far as to proceed (at Baba's bidding) with the Gita and next with Jnaneshwari. All these he understood, and when Kaka Saheb Dixit and Jog had doubts, he cleared their doubts. They were learned scholars and had regularly studied Sanskrit. But my father had not, and so they said

my father's understanding was inspired by Baba's grace. But Baba once stopped his further explaining things to others. "Why should we explain things to others? That will make us puffed up with self-conceit." As for quasi spiritual benefits derived by my father instances will be given presently of the cures he effected when he spent his last two months with me here at Poona.

Temporal benefit may include not only the growing esteem in which he was held by all who knew him and the consequent increase of his influence, but also the safeguarding and advancement of the interests of all members of his family, including my self. I had been taken to Baba from my infancy by my father and Baba spoke to me and spoke of me always affectionately giving me the sobriquet, "Somniya."

In 1912, I was a police Sub-Inspector at Kopergaon; and Shirdi was within my jurisdiction. As soon as I got my first pay, I sent rupees two every month by M.O. to Baba. That was my father's order and possibly his vow. I continued that payment every month up to 1920 i.e. till shortly after my father's death. When I was at Kopergaon my father and I went down once to Shirdi. Then Baba asked me to pay a dakshina of 10 rupees and I did. It appeared to have no significance at that time. But about six months later, I got the order that my pay was increased by 10 rupees from that date (i.e. the date of my paying the dakshina). I got a transfer in 1912 from Kopergaon to Poona. Another instance of Baba's care for me was mentioned by my father, even before I got my service. It seems that Baba, sitting at his Mosque, would take up coins and be rubbing them with his fingers saying "*Kakacha*" "*Somyahca*" etc. My father said that showed that I was often in Baba's mind and that augured nothing but good for me. Of numerous instances of Baba's taking all care of us, Yogakshema bahamyaham the chief may be his looking after my father himself during the last 3 years of his life. In 1916, my wife was in the family way and we looked forward to my parents to come here, so that my mother may help in the delivery. We had no other help. My father and mother left Nimon on that account to go to Poona. But as Shirdi is near and as there were rumours that Baba was passing away, they first visited Baba. Once they went to Baba, he detained them and did not give them leave to go

away- either back to Nimon or forward to Poona. My father did not understand the reason for this refusal and Madhava Rao on his behalf asked Baba for leave.

Baba: Do you want to kill my people? Is Kaka eating away your father's property?

Madhav Rao: But his daughter-in-law is pregnant and needs help.

Baba: Arre 'Kaka' why are you anxious? God will help.

Baba also said to my father at that time, "bury me and then go." When Baba detained my father, he tied a cloth bandage to his own arm which he kept on for three years and removed only four days before his death. My father died four months thereafter. That is just what he anticipated and told Madhav Rao when he left Shirdi two or four days after Baba expired.

When my parents were being thus detained at Shirdi, we at Poona were relying solely on their going to us for the accouchement and made no other arrangements up to the last. Suddenly one night my wife told me "I feel that pains are coming". At once, I ordered a tonga and took her at 10 P.M. to the Poona Municipal Maternity Hospital and left her abed. The nurse that ought to have attended on her was talking with me in an adjoining room. It was about 11 P.M. At once we heard the cry of the new born child, a male child. The delivery was over without any help. It was a safe delivery. At that time- or rather just before delivery, Baba said to my father at Shirdi: "There was a woman. She was taken to a place. There she was delivered safe, of a male child."

Soon after the delivery, I sent my brother with "peda" which is usually presented to all on the birth of a child- to Baba and to my parents at Shirdi requesting that my mother may go over and help us at Poona. Permission was not given to her to go. My father then told my brother of what Baba had said to him about the delivery on the very day of its birth. That was Bhadrapad 1916.

Another instance of Baba's care for our family is this. In December, 1917, plague was beginning its ravages at Poona; and during Xmas holidays, I started with my first son Gopal, then a child 2 or 3 years to Nimon where my brother's

wife had recently had a safe delivery. On the way, we halted at Shirdi. Baba in sending me away with the usual Udhi said "*Porala jiv lav*" which means "Save the child." Interpreting it as a mere blessing intended for my Gopal, I gave him the Udhi and started off in a tonga to Nimon. When we reached that place, my brother's baby, 12 days' old, was in a precarious condition. It had become cold and chill and the parents lost all hope and thought the child was dead. Then I be thought myself of Baba's words at parting and found that he must have referred to this child and not to my boy. I searched for the Udhi he had given me. But it had been lost during the journey. So I took the baby on my lap and sent up a fervent mental appeal with all my strength, with all my soul entreating Baba to save the child. In 15 minutes' time, the child improved and became alright gradually and is now called "Datta" i.e. God's gift, in consequence. Plague was still prevalent at Poona when I wanted to return. When I wanted to start from Shirdi back to Poona, Baba was loath to give me permission. But I had no "leave" to stay and must rejoin duty on 8-1-1917. So my father put Udhi in Baba's hands and practically forced him to give me leave. So we returned on 3rd January. My landlord was there down with plague and on the 4th, my wife was attacked. We could not escape elsewhere; my self, children and all stayed there. Baba saved her and saved us all. She i.e. my wife recovered her health but her eyesight was lost. At that time the question of leaving the town and going to a health camp was mooted before Baba; but he did not permit it. "Why leave home?" was what he said. We followed his guidance and were safe. When my wife was unwell, we had also requested my father to go to Poona. But Baba then told him again "Bury me and then go."

In March or April, 1917, I fell ill, it might be plague or Typhoid perhaps. Again I wrote to father to go to Poona. Again Baba refused permission- but said "Why are you anxious? Your Somniya will recover and come here to see us". I had twenty one days continuous fever and lived on water alone. Then I recovered. I took leave for a period of two or three months for convalescence and went first with my family to Belapur where the Samadhi of Vidyanandswami (who gave me my regular initiation into my mantra and my Bhakti marga) is. There I stayed for a while and my mother came

there and took us all to Shirdi, I had improved very little at Belapur and was very weak. When I went to Shirdi, Baba said I should be given a little *Kichadi* thenceforward. That was done. I stayed there a month and picked up my health and strength.

I was with Baba some days before he passed away. He was ailing and people were anxious about him. When I wanted to start he was unwilling to permit me to go. But I had to go and I went away to Poona. Some three days after Baba passed away, my father left for Nimon and then he went to Ahmadnagar and thence at my request (as I had pain in my side) he came and stayed with us, at Poona. Here he continued till his death which was some two months after he came there. My father had intense *dhyasa* of (i.e. absorption in) Baba during the closing days of his life and he treated (or looked on) all persons going to him as Sai Baba. He was a Ramabhakta all alone and he died with the words “Sri Ram” on his lips. Of course, Sai Baba and Sri Ram are not different. I was privileged to serve Sai Baba during his life for four days. My father had been called away to give evidence at Ahmadnagar and had to stay there four days. When he started for Nagar, he left me at Shirdi to do every service to Baba that he usually did. There was one difference however. He did the service sitting being an old man. As a younger man, I did the service on my legs. I found the service was physically taxing all my energies to the uttermost. To be at the beck and call of Baba all day and till he retired to rest was no little effort. During those days, I had a blessed vision. I was at the Mosque. Baba was in his usual place and Madhav Rao near the steps. Suddenly, Baba appeared to me in the form of Maruti. There was not more Sai Baba’s usual figure. There was the Maruti body. Only I did not see if there was a tail. Seeing that form I told Madhav Rao at once “Take his darshan. See He is Maruti”. Baba was undoubtedly a Ramabhakta. Baba on Chavadi days would stop opposite to Maruti Temple and muttering something, wave his arm towards Maruti fifteen or twenty times. My usual current of thoughts was worldly. But as I stayed near Baba, my usual current of thoughts was switched off; and there was a new current of thoughts within me. However, I had very little

touch with Baba - unlike my father whose powers and nature seemed to have developed greatly by contact with Baba.

When my father was at Ahmadnagar about November, 1918, I was suffering from pain in my side- as though it was the commencement of Appendicitis. So I wrote to my father and he came and stayed with me at Poona. He came and applied Udhi to me and from the very next day, there was no more pain. My brother was with me and he was showing signs of incipient consumption. My father gave him Udhi and Tirtha and he recovered. My nephew "Datta" had itch all over his head, My father gave him 'Udhi' and cured the itch. My father was always orthodox and paying strict attention to his religious duties. Baba respected his orthodoxy and would not give him any prasad that an orthodox man should not take.

I noticed Baba's foot prints. There was a clear "*Matsya*" mark on one foot, and a clear "*Dhanushya*" on the other. Only great Saints can have such marks.